

Message Text

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 4520

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: MARR LE SY IS PEPR
SUBJ: REPORTED REMARKS OF HIGH-RANKING SYRIAN MILITARY OFFICER
ON SITUATION IN LEBANON

1. IN CONVERSATION WITH DCM AND EMBOFF ON AUGUST 7, NORWEGIAN
CHARGE HANS LONGVA NOTED THAT HE HAD MET IN DAMASCUS ON AUGUST
6 WITH A "HIGH-RANKING SYRIAN MILITARY OFFICER" WHO HAD ACCOM-
PANIED KHADDAM TO BEIRUT ON AUGUST 3. (CHIEF OF STAFF HIKMAT
SHIHABI WAS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE THE ONLY SUCH PERSON TO HAVE MADE
THE TROP.) THIS OFFICER HAD SAID THE FOLLOWING:

A. KHADDAM'S VISIT TO BEIRHT HAD BEEN A FIAILURE. PRESIDENT
SARKIS AND FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS HAD TOLD KHADDAM THEY FAVORED
RENEWAL OF THE ADF MANDATE FOR ANOTHER SIX MONTHS BEGINNING IN
OCTOBER, BUT THE LEBANESE HAD REFUSED TO REQUEST RENEWAL FORMALLY.
KHADDAM HAD REPLIED THAT SYRIAN SOLDIERS WOULD NOT REMAIN IN LEBA-
NON WHEN THE PRESENT ADF MANDATE EXPIRED, IF THE LEBANESE DID
NOT FORMALLY REQUEST AN EXTENSION. IN CONTRAST TO SARKIS AND

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BOUTROS, PRIME MINISTER HOSS' SEEMED TO FAVOR ASKING FOR AN
EXTENSION NOW.

B. KHADDAM IN HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH THE LEBANESE HAD OFFERED TO:
(1) ALLOW THE LEBANESE ARMY TO TAKE OVER SECURITY FUNCTIONS WITHIN
THE CITY, AND (2) TO WITHDRAW ALL SYRIAN FORCES FROM EAST AND WEST
BEIRUT AND TO STATION THEM ON THE HILLS SURROUNDING THE CITY.

BOUTROS HAD REFUSED THIS OFFER, HOWEVER, SAYING THAT CIVIL WAR WOULD BREAK OUT IMMEDIATELY BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND CHRISTIANS IF THE SYRIANS LEFT THE CITY. BOUTROS HAD PROPOSED INSTEAD THAT THE SYRIANS REMAIN IN THE CITY, AND THAT THE GOL BE ALLOWED TO CONTROL HOW THE SYRIANS WOULD RESPOND TO ANY CHRISTIAN PROVOCATIONS. KHADDAM HAD REJECTED THIS PROPOSAL AND SAID THE SYRIANS MUST HAVE A FREE HAND ON DECIDING HOW TO RESPOND TO CHRISTIAN FIRE.

2. "THE HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICER" ALSO OFFERED THE FOLLOWING PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS, LONGVA SAID:

A. WITH REGARD TO THE RECENT VOTE OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO CUT AID TO SYRIA, IF THE PRESENT "PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN" AGAINST DAMASCUS CONTINUED, SARG WOULD BE FACED WITH TWO CHOICES: (A) WITHDRAWAL, OR (B) A SHORT BUT MAJOR MILITARY CONFRONTATION WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA. THE LATTER OPTION WAS MORE LIKELY.

B. SYRIAN SOLDIERS IN LEBANON WERE TAKING ABOUT 15 CASUALTIES PER WEEK. IF THE GOVERNMENT IN DAMASCUS FORBADE RETALIATION FOR THESE CASUALTIES, THE SYRIAN ARMY IN LEBANON WOULD LIKELY MUTINY.

3. LONGVA ALSO NOTED THAT THE "HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICER" HAD SHOWN AN ALMOST BENIGN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ISRAELI POSITION. THE OFFICER HAD NOTED:

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A. THE ISRAELIS DID NOT REALLY BELIEVE THE SYRIANS HAD ACCOMPANIED THE LEBANESE ARMY TO KAWKABA, BUT HAD MADE SUCH AN ASSERTION ONLY BECAUSE HADDAD HAD INSISTED ON IT. INDEED, THIS ASSERTION WAS SO RIDICULOUS, THE ISRAELIS HAD PROBABLY MADE IT PRIMARILY TO EMBARRASS HADDAD.

B. THE ISRAELIS HAD STRONG INFLUENCE, BUT NOT TOTAL CONTROL OVER HADDAD. ISRAEL HAD TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT SOMEWHAT THE INTERESTS OF HADDAD AND THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS IN BEIRUT, AS LONG AS ISRAEL DID NOT WANT TO CUT ITS TIES COMPLETELY WITH THEM.

C. THE CHRISTIANS WERE INCORRECT IN BELIEVING THAT ISRAEL WOULD INTERVENE IN LEBANON DIRECTLY ON THEIR BEHALF.

4. COMMENT: IF KHADDAM IN FACT OFFERED TO WITHDRAW SYRIAN TROOPS FROM BEIRUT IN FAVOR OF LEBANESE SOLDIERS, THIS COULD BE A MAJOR CHANGE IN THE SYRIAN POSITION. ALL OUR LEBANESE SOURCES TELL US, HOWEVER, THAT THE SYRIANS WILL NOT WITHDRAW AND ALLOW THE LEBANESE ARMY TO REPLACE THEM AT PRESENT. END COMMENT.
PARKER

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